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/Summary/

SEPARATION OF STATISTICAL THEORY FROM THE PRACTICE OF SOCIALIST CONSTRUCTION

(Review of Kurs statistiki v [illegible]
/A Short Course in Statistics/, G. S. Kreynin, Gosplanizdat, Moscow, 1946)

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The book which I am reviewing has been approved by the educational institutions section of the Central Statistics Administration of the Gosplan as a textbook for the course of instruction given to regional and local inspectors of the Central Statistics Administration. Thus, it is a book which should give the vast army of accounting and statistical workers a knowledge of Marxist-Leninist statistical theory and guidance in everyday practical work. The basic requirements of such a work are that it closely links statistics with the practice of socialist construction and national economic planning, and that it gives generalizations from practical experience in Soviet statistics.

The Short Course in Statistics, however, is a separation of statistical theory from the practice of socialist construction and the substitution of hollow scholastic definitions, removed from real political and economic tasks, for real scientific light on the problems of statistics.

In the chapter "The Nature of Statistics," the author says, "The term 'statistics' supposes that numerical data have been obtained on the basis of mass observation, a method which permits the discovery of those characteristics of homogeneous phenomena which emerge not only under the influence of usual causes, but from additional conditions which enter in various combinations."

This "definition" of statistics substitutes abstract reasoning about "usual causes" and "various combinations" for problems of socialist-economic analysis, immediately orienting the reader away from politics and economics.

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A course in statistics for practical workers in accounting and statistics should first of all give a clear and definitive exposition of Marxist-Leninist statistical science and its application to statistical practice in the USSR. For lower-level accountants and statisticians in State institutions and economic organizations, a compilation of the most important methods of processing and analyzing data is needed. A textbook for workers of this level should tell how to obtain statistical material, process it scientifically, collate, and analyze it.

Kreynin's book gives considerable space to material which could only be understood by one having a solid mathematical preparation (dispersion, analysis, range distribution, the least squares method, etc.). A great many such concepts are used, in his economic analysis. Entirely missing from the book are a number of problems of prime importance to the practical worker, such as the method of relative magnitudes and a number of others. There is not a single example of coherent analysis of economic problems by statistical methods given in this book, which reflects perfectly the politically disinterested character of all Kreynin's works.

There is not even a mention of the 1946-1950 Five-Year Plan, although the textbook went to press in November 1946 and came out in 1947.

Planned socialist economy is unthinkable without properly organized accounting and statistics. Statistics reveal additional reserves for speeding the rate of reconstruction, reveal disproportions in the progress of plan fulfillment, and make possible anticipation and elimination of such disproportion.

In Kreynin's book, the practical work of Soviet statistical agencies is either completely overlooked, or mentioned only in a word or two. He touches only superficially on the methods of verifying original data, or on combating "eyewash" and illegal accounting.

The defects of the book are not accidental. They are the logical consequence of the false original position taken by the author in theoretical statistics. His is the quantitative, purely formal approach characteristic of bourgeois statistics.

Lenin called this sort of thing mere "exercises" and "figure-play" and demanded the combination of theoretical and statistical analysis, with theoretical analysis predominating. "Statistics," he said, "should illustrate social-economic relationships which have been established by thorough analysis, and not become an end in themselves...." (V. I. Lenin, Works, Vol III, p 394)

The depravity of the author's position inevitably leads him to inaccurate use of statistical methods in those few instances where he does deal with real economic problems. In this connection, I cite his attempt to make an "alignment" of the USSR national income from 1932 to 1938 by an "exponential curve." This attempt is unjustifiable, theoretically or practically. The use of this or other means of aligning numerical series has significance only when the basic line of growth is clear through the mass of incidental fluctuations. In these cases "alignment" gives graphic presentation of the general trend manifested by a number of fluctuating values. The behavior of the national income is based on other laws deriving from the nature of the expanding socialist reproduction (vosproizvodstvo). Therefore, there is no basis or necessity to "align" the dynamic ranges of the USSR national income. It can lead to nothing but gross misrepresentation. That is exactly what happened. The data "computed" by the author concerning the national income do not concur with the facts for even one of the years. They distort the real dynamics of the income over the period considered, and at the same time show the ruinous results of substituting arbitrary fabrication of "conceptual models" for the study of real economic facts.

We may well ask: Who needs such "statistics," which, to gratify every sort of formalistic exercise, destory the real course of growth of the national economy?

Rejection of qualitative economic analysis led the author to gross distortions of Leninist methodology of groupings, which occupies the most important place in socialist statistics. It is well known that Lenin attached great importance to the grouping of statistical material and established very important principals of grouping. He considered the method of grouping one of the basic means of processing and analyzing statistical data. The author cites two tables from Lenin's "The Development of Capitalism in Russia." But these tables are cited by Kraynin in confirmation of the thesis that the selection of criteria for grouping by types "should be dictated by the problems of separating out corresponding types."

Lenin believed the selection of criteria for grouping was dictated by the nature of the phenomenon being studied: "Once it has been recognized that there are qualitative as well as quantitative differences between different farms, there appears the absolute necessity of dividing peasants into groups distinguished not by prosperity but by social-economic character of the farm." (V. I. Lenin, Works, Vol I, p 48-49) In "The Development of Capitalism in Russia," Lenin wrote on the subject of grouping peasant farms: "Economic statistics must be considered on the basis of size and type of farm. The criteria for differentiation of these types should be taken according to regional conditions and types of cultivation." (V. I. Lenin, Works, Vol III, p 69)

These and many other remarks by Lenin on the question of methodology of grouping, we must assume, are known to the author of this course on statistics which I am reviewing. But he ignores Lenin's concept of grouping, and presents his own idea that statistical grouping itself should establish the qualitative criteria of a given phenomenon.

Kraynin's calculations omit the lower and higher groups, that is, the poor and kulak elements. This mode of calculation Kraynin borrows from the Zemstvo statistics which used this method to gloss over the class stratification in the prerevolutionary village.

He also ignores Lenin and Stalin's pronouncements on the theory of mean values. He merely explains the methods of computing mean values and greatly confuses the question.

Suddenly and without explanation, the author introduces the concept of "functional criteria" as a basis for the selection of several forms of means. But all that is gained from this is simply the "basis" for the necessity of using the geometrical mean. "In many cases," we read, "in a fixed period of time, production, productivity of labor, etc., have a tendency to grow from year to year in a geometrical progression because of a systematic year to year change of material conditions for this growth. In such a case, to arrive at the mean coefficient of growth and the mean magnitude of the functional criteria corresponding to it (for example, the average production over a given period of time, corresponding to the general conditions for this growth), it is necessary to seek the geometrical mean."

It is evident from the above quotation that the author proposes to use a geometrical mean for the calculation of the mean coefficient of growth where the exponent changes in the geometrical progression. But there is no need in this case to compute a mean at all. From mathematics we know that a geometrical progression is a series of numbers in which each succeeding term is obtained by increasing the preceding term by one and the same factor (coefficient), this factor remaining constant for a given series. We may then ask, why compute the mean once the coefficient does not change? On the contrary, the geometrical mean is used where the coefficients of growth are diverse.

The author confuses the question of using the geometrical mean even further by introducing the proposal that alignment by exponential curve be used for determining the average percentage of growth, and by his thesis of "growth or decrease of the magnitude of the phenomenon in a geometrical progression." It is

[illegible] whether it is necessary to compute the average yearly rate of increase according to "exponential functions" or to use the geometrical mean, which is used in planning and statistical work.

The author also distorts the Leninist-Stalinist principles of analysis in the chapter "Time Series." Stalin has, with the greatest profundity and inclusiveness, developed questions of level and tempo, of percent increment, of indices of economic level of national growth. Kreynin confines himself to quoting one passage from Stalin's works, concerning percent increment, in the section "Preparation of Time Series for Analysis." Evidently, the author believes that the true series analysis is alignment according to some curve or other which is current in bourgeois statistics, while Stalin's method is only a "preparation for analysis."

The chapter called "The Method Selected" is largely an exposition of the ideas of the English bourgeois scholars, Student and Ronald Fisher. Blindly and uncritically, he bows before bourgeois statistics, completely omitting the Marxist-Leninst evaluation of their apologist nature.

Beside units of observation, the author believes it necessary to bring in the concept of units of accounting. But just how does a unit of accounting differ from a unit of observation? "We must distinguish between a unit of accounting and a unit of observation," writes Kreynin. "The determination of the quantity of the unit of accounting serves to clarify the magnitude of the phenomenon relative to one unit of observation." What, for instance, would be the quantity of the unit of accounting which would clarify "the magnitude of the phenomenon relative to one unit of observation" in the taking of a census where the unit of observation is one person?

The author also distorts the question of classification of criteria. He puts all criteria into two categories--factorial and resultant. There is no justification for such a division. Sex, age, and many other criteria cannot be fitted into either category.

Kreynin writes, "The monographic method is related to statistical methods of collection and analysis of materials observed. This method is one of description and characterization of typical objects of one group, the data from which can be applied to the totality of those objects. By such a method can be undertaken descriptions of separate villages, farms, factories, plants, etc. Those facts which do not gain reflection in current accounting would get in, in this type of research." Such a definition of the monographic method is incorrect. It is not always possible to apply data obtained by monographic research to a totality of objects. For example, it would be an error to compute the gross yield of grain by the kolkhoz of a given oblast, not to mention the USSR as a whole, on the basis of data on the average productivity of one or several kolkhoz, even granting they were typical kolkhoz.

Kreynin gives the average outputs for one worker per year in iron and steel plants, grouped according to extent of reconstruction (which for some reason the author calls "technical status of equipment"). All three average outputs are incorrectly calculated and without weight. The person studying this is being trained to do the operation as it should not be done, and as no one does it.

The publication of this book was a blunder on the part of the Gosplanizdat (State Planning Commission Publishing House) and its director, I. Yu. Pisarev.

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